MRS. SMITH AND MRS. BROWN.

A DOMESTIC DIALOGUE.

TIME.—*Morning.*

[MRS. SMITH, having allowed her cook to go out, allows her housemaid to be generally busy in departments not usually pertaining to the "neat-handed" Sarah; while Mrs. Smith herself, in morning dress, and remarkably pretty cap, dusts china ornaments in her "own sweet little drawing-room," pulls down Venetian blinds to spare her carpet, and arranges, softly and lovingly, a few books on an ornamental table: but she loiters in a manner that a deputy-housemaid ought not to do, dipping into the lovely illustrated "Evangeline" for full five minutes, still standing, but resting first on one side and then on the other, as little girls are always scolded for doing, and dropping into a chair, when in the dusting she glances at a page of the "Casa Guidi Windows," that had not struck her with its full force before. A patter of little feet is heard; the book is closed, and enter Susan the nursemaid, equipped for walking with Master Willy and Miss Katey, aged respectively four and two years. Bright eyes, soft, rosy cheeks, silken, curly locks, streaming beneath large sun-shading Leghorn hats; short full skirts, and little Katey's coquetish cazaweck, and snow-white socks and coal-black polished leather shoes, must be shown to paint their picture. Several demonstrative hugs between mother and children, somewhat to the detriment of Mrs. Smith's cap, are accompanied by crowing laughter. "Dood-by, mamma; dood-by! Tusan take us to see the twans; and such a nice walk! Dood-by!" And the four impatient little feet scamper away; Mrs. Smith watching them out of the gate, as she peers between the bars of the blind. Then with a sudden thought she unrolls some new music, opens the piano, and with the manner of a brilliant player when trying a strange piece, repeats one or two *queer* passages three or four times. A sharp double knock is heard, and the busy Sarah shows in Mrs. Brown: civil neighborly greetings ensue.]

Mrs. Brown. I heard the piano going, and so judged you would see me, though it is hardly ten o'clock; but neighbors ought to be neighborly; and, as I said to Mr. Brown, I was sure if you could help me you would.

Mrs. Smith. I am sure anything I can do——

Mrs. Brown. Oh, what a difference [*looking round with envious admiration*]. *You* can sit down in comfort to music the first thing in the morning.

Mrs. Smith. It is not my usual time for playing, but my husband brought me home some new quadrilles and a polka last night; and as we are going to a little carpet dance to-night, where I may be useful, I thought I would try them over. But what is it that I can do for you, Mrs. Brown?

Mrs. Brown [*sighing*]. My dear, you are a young wife—not married above five or six years—and you have had the luck to have *treasures* (trebly italicized); but as for me, servants are my torments. I sent off the whole pack last night, and have only a horrid washerwoman in the house. Does your cook know of any friend she can recommend? That is what I wanted to ask you.

Mrs. Smith. I hardly think it likely, but I will ask Sarah if she knows any one. Cook is not at home; she is gone to the Institute.

Mrs. Brown. What, again! Then it was she that I saw so smart getting into the omnibus. Well, I must say you spoil them.

Mrs. Smith [*smiling*]. And yet I get on remarkably well. It is cook's third visit. I actually sent her to-day because she had neglected to go over the model lodging-houses, and I wished her so much to see them.

Mrs. Brown. My dear Mrs. Smith, what could it signify?

Mrs. Smith. A good deal, I think. However, I do not wonder at the omission, as I believe on the first occasion she had no eyes for anything except the kitchen-ranges; her account of which interested me particularly. I know, with all my Friday and Saturday visits, *I* have not found them out yet.

Mrs. Brown. Is it possible you talk to your servants in this way?

Mrs. Smith. Why not? I assure you we always consider our servants as humble friends, and interest ourselves in all that concerns them.

Mrs. Brown. But you wouldn't if you had such wretches as I have to deal with. Why in eight months I have had five cooks, three housemaids, and four little imps in buttons: they have nearly broken my heart, and quite made differences between Mr. Brown and me; and it has been so all my life. Oh, Mrs. Smith, how do you manage; and where did you get your servants from?

Mrs. Smith. I hardly remember how I procured them; through some ordinary channel of recommendation, I believe; and I know I received excellent characters, which experience has convinced me they deserved. In fact, I would not engage a servant unless her appearance, acquirements, and gene-

ral recommendation were an earnest that she would suit. Then, when one has a good servant, kindness and consideration, with fair wages, will always keep her. In fact, I believe kindness is thought more of than wages by many; though we are of opinion that servants ought to receive good wages—enough to lay by for their old age.

Mrs. Brown. But they never do. It all goes in finery, and that is what I will not allow; it was a quarrel about a bonnet ribbon that made me part with Mary at last. I put up with her impudence for four months, but couldn't endure it any longer.

Mrs. Smith. Certain limits are no doubt desirable, but a thoroughly good and *happy* servant usually saves from her wages, and generally has sense enough not to dress absurdly. I do not care how *good* my servants' clothes are, both for the sake of their appearance and for economy, knowing well that cheap things are always the dearest in the end.

Mrs. Brown [*shaking her head with the wisdom of forty-five addressing the inexperience of twenty-eight*]. I see we shall never agree. I don't know what the world is coming to. Now there 's the postman. I should not wonder if there are letters for the kitchen as well as for you.

Mrs. Smith. Very likely, for all the servants have relations in the country.

Enter SARAH, *with a letter for* MRS. SMITH, *and another in her hand.*

Mrs. Brown [*to Mrs. Smith*]. May I ask her?

Mrs. Smith. I was just going to do so. [*To the housemaid.*] Sarah, Mrs. Brown wants a cook; do you know of one?

Sarah. I think I do. [*Hesitates and stammers.*] That is, no; I am afraid the young person I was thinking of would not suit you, ma'am.

Mrs. Brown. Not suit me, Sarah! What do you mean? Is she honest, clean, sober? A good cook?

Sarah [*indignant for her friend*]. Oh yes, ma'am, but—but perhaps she would not do.

Mrs. Brown. Why not?

Sarah. You see, ma'am, it would be such a dreadful thing if she didn't suit, to lose a five years' character, and only leaving because her master has lost money, and is reducing his establishment; and she wants to stay with half wages, only he won't let her, and so she is teaching the eldest daughter to know about cooking; and so, ma'am, she couldn't leave yet, and of course you couldn't wait. No, I don't know any servant, I am sure, that I should like to recommend.

Mrs. Brown [*with a half glimmer that Sarah does know of a* treasure, *but won't consign her to No.* 5]. Oh, very well, I don't wish it to be considered a favor.

Sarah. Of course not, ma'am.

[*Sarah curtseys, and leaves the room.*

Mrs. Smith [*almost timidly*]. If it would not be considered presumptuous in me, so much younger a housekeeper, to give advice, I would say to you, when you can succeed in procuring good servants, to try the plan of treating them indulgently. They are our fellow-creatures—with the same hopes and desires, failings and weaknesses, and infirmities of temper—we must not expect perfection; and if we show them *sympathy*, it is astonishing the influence ——

Mrs. Brown [*decidedly tartly*]. Now I know what you are going to say; but I never will give in to those new-fangled notions. I won't allow followers, and I won't allow letter scribbling; and what I say in my own house shall be done, and I won't be answered by a minx; and if I choose a thing to be done one way one day, and another way another, what 's that to them? What business have they to say that I don't know my own mind, and begin to cry, and to talk about their characters?

Mrs. Smith [*a little warmly*]. Oh, Mrs. Brown, anger often terrifies a timid girl, not naturally dull, into seeming stupidity and obstinacy. I pity them from my heart; and I deeply feel a mistress has grave responsibilities towards her female servants. Servitude at best is an abandonment of liberty, and must bring many trials; how cruel of us to make it needlessly bitter by our caprices and exactions! And, on the other hand, what a happiness it is to feel one's self served from affection as well as duty! I speak from experience: our household is a household of love; these walls have never echoed to an angry reproof; there is no fear, there is no deception in the house; and I believe our servants feel it to be their *home;* it always gladdens me when I hear them call it so.

Mrs. Brown. It is all very fine; but how do you know that you are not cheated?

Mrs. Smith. From many circumstances, besides my own faith in those about me. I give you one, for example: I know that our expenses are nearly a hundred a year less than those of many friends who appear to live more plainly. But all in the house draw together to avoid waste, and all act without separate interests. The servants themselves are like sisters, and help one another—as is the case to-day—in affectionate fellowship. If I give one of them a holiday, I scarcely know the difference in the house. I know people say I have been particularly *fortunate;* but is it not strange, dear Mrs. Brown, that one person should have all the bad servants, and another all the good?

Mrs. Brown. Not at all, if you give them high wages, and let them have their own way.

Mrs. Smith. Not their own way, unless it is my way also. I assure you I am extremely particular; but then we are also very regular in our habits; and knowing myself that I dearly like to be praised when I do well, why I give praise to those about me when they deserve it.

Mrs. Brown [*rising, and with a Burleigh shake of the head*]. They won't bear it.

Mrs. Smith. Oh, yes they will—do *try* just for three months with your next set of servants. But don't go yet; here come the "trots" from their walk —you must see them.

Enter SUSAN *and the children; the latter laden with hedge-flowers.* MRS. BROWN *admires and caresses the children, whom* SUSAN, *at her mistress's bidding, has left in the drawing-room.* MRS. BROWN *says something about "spoiling," which* KATEY *does not understand, though she opens her large eyes still wider, as if in the effort to comprehend. Kitchens in general not being very remote from drawing-rooms, a sound of bitter violent weeping is heard proceeding from the lower regions.* MRS. SMITH *rushes to the stairs to ask what is the matter;* MRS. BROWN *following, in charge of the children.*

Sarah [*sympathetic, with her apron corner to her eye*]. Oh, ma'am, poor Susan has got a letter from home, and her sister that's been ill so long—that was in the hospital for months—is dying; the doctors say she can't live three days.

Mrs. Smith [*going into the kitchen*]. Oh, I am so sorry! Is it the poor girl that had the "bad knee" from that hard place?

Sarah. Yes, ma'am; the brutes that kept her scrubbing from morning till night; I wonder they can't be hung for murder.

Mrs. Smith. Hush, Sarah; it will do no good to reproach them more. No doubt they have learned a lesson from their severity, and will regret it as long as they live. [*To Susan: putting her hand kindly on her shoulder.*] My poor girl, what can I do to comfort you?

Susan [*sobbing violently*]. Oh, ma'am, she do so fret to see me once more! There 's—only—a—a year between us; and we came up to London together.

Mrs. Smith. Then go to her, of course, by all means.

Susan [*sobbing still, and kissing one of Mrs. Smith's hands*]. Oh, ma'am, I was afraid—cook—being out—you couldn't let me; and if I don't go to-day I may never see her—again—O ma'am—bless you!—bless you!—ma'am. No one ever had such a mistress.

Mrs. Smith. Hush, my poor girl; try to be calm—she may recover still—doctors often make mistakes —and if not, remember, it is the will of God—and think how much your poor sister suffered. Sarah, fetch her a glass of wine, and then look for the paper—it is in the breakfast-room—that we may see when the next train to Reading goes. That is the one she wants, is it not?

Exit SARAH, *who returns with the paper and a glass of wine.* SUSAN *revives a little. The paper states there is a train* 1 *h.* 55 *m.;* MRS. SMITH *observes there is only just time to arrange, as there is a long omnibus ride to the station.* SUSAN *shakes her head at the mention of dinner, and* MRS. SMITH *suggests to* SARAH *a packet of sandwiches to put into the traveler's bag.* WILLY *and* KATEY *promise to be very good with dear mamma, and kiss "poor"* SUSAN—*little lids trembling with the ready tears.*

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SUPPLEMENTARY SCENE.—*No.* 5. MR. *and* MRS. BROWN *anathematizing mutton-chops cooked (?) by washerwomen.*

Mr. Brown [*crossly*]. Mrs. B., as my mother, who was a Norfolk woman, used to say, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating;" and I do maintain Smith's is the pleasantest house I know to go to: *he* never sits down to a dinner of fat and cinders, I know—and what does it signify if she spoils the servants, if she gets the best sort of work out of them nevertheless? I never saw plate so polished—and *they 've* no man. As for the spring-soup, the other day, it was fit for an alderman; and in the winter, that venison I shall never forget—why can't *we* have hot-water plates, I should like to know?

Mrs. Brown. Brown, you are quite a brute to talk of such things at such a time—when you know I am almost frantic.

Mr. Brown. I am not a brute; but this I do say, that the *young* wives seem to me in the main the best managers.

Mrs. Brown. You had better bury me—I shall soon be worried into my grave—and then you can have a young wife.

Mr. Brown. Don't talk like an old fool. Hang it —it is enough to make a man savage—scold, scold, scold—change, change, change.

Mrs. Brown [*weeping*]. Because I get hold of a parcel of wretches, and Mrs. Smith has treasures.

Mr. Brown. I fancy she helps to make them treasures; and it isn't as if she could be very active in the house herself—I am sure she isn't; such a charming accomplished woman—the life and ornament of society, and as pretty——

MRS. BROWN *bursts into a fit of hysterics.* MR. BROWN *acknowledges he is a brute; calls her "darling," and "dear Nancy," and the scene closes on mutual flatteries and condolence,* MR. B. *promising never to set up* MRS. SMITH *as a pattern again.*